

An Inaugural Dissertation on
the Pulse, submitted to the examina-
tion of

The Trustees and Medical Faculty
of the University of Pennsylvania
for the degree of Doctor of
Medicine by Archibald B. Leach
of Alleghenia — April 12
1808 —

In an attempt to prove, the fallacy of the
pulse, as a guide, in the treatment of cer-
tain diseases, I should do injustice to
the talents and zeal, of the professor of
the Institutes and practice of Med. in
this University, were I not to acknow-
ledge my belief, that it is the great cen-
tral of the system; that other symp-
toms may often be uncertain, and are,
generally useful, only, when taken col-
lectively. The introduction of the an-
tiphlogistic plan of treatment of some
diseases by Sydenham, may be con-
sidered as forming one of the most
important eras in the progress of the
healing art. Too, tho' not sugges-
ted by any great principles univer-

sally applicable to disease; it has contributed to lay the foundation of a theory of medicine that elevates the profession to the dignity of a science.

But important as an attention to the state of the pulse is in the treatment of disease, it will not I think be difficult to prove that it sometimes invites to the adoption of mischievous and even fatal practice. It is an evil, often, attending the acquisition, of any good, that, other minor sources, of usefulness and information, which, we have long been in possession of, should sustain a diminution of value. And if the sanguine expectations of mankind often dispose them to overvalue a new discovery in philosophy or the arts, may we not suppose that a

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benevolent disposition would be more
apt to overrate an improvement in a
science which has for its object
the health and happiness of the hu-
man race — Sublata causa tollitur
effectus had once its reign as a medi-
cal axiom; but when supplanted by
new principles, an indiscriminate ap-
plication of the latter has often de-
prived us of much benefit that ^{apt} mi-
have been deprived from an attention
to the former. I shall therefore en-
deavour to prove first that the ^{to} state
of the pulse has been too much relied
on, to the exclusion of a regard to
the cause of disease. The success
of Dr White's practice in puerperal fe-
ver, remarkably exemplifies the ad =

advantages resulting from a removal of
the exciting cause without much
attention to the state of the pulse.
Great quickness of pulse was a dis-
tinguishing symptom, accompanied
sometimes, especially, in the com-
mencement with some tension.

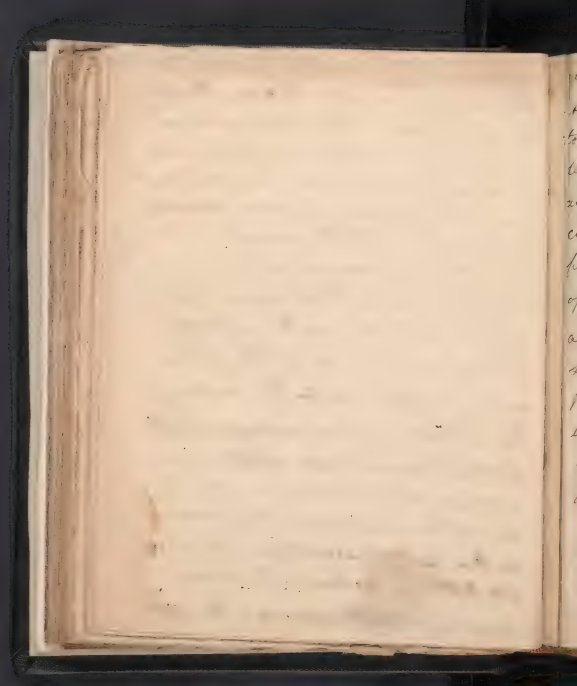
But believing that the usual ^{use} ~~ca~~
of this disease was a retention of the
lochia and faces become acrid from
constipation; and knowing that the
prophylaxis consisted in avoiding
these and a hot regimen (~~together with~~
~~an abundance of temperance~~) he con-
cluded that a continuance of the ac-
tion of these internal irritating causes
must prolong and aggravate the fe-
ver. The removal of them, together with
remedies calculated to excite gently,

the existing cases without much
attention to the state of the lungs
first purgative of face was a
purging system according to
the nature of the case, in the
management with some
But knowing that the case
of this disease was a retention of
food and pain become acute for
identification; and knowing that
hydrophobia consists in a
there was a low regimen

which that a continuance of the
time of their natural vitality
must first be and afterwards
for the removal of their
anxious relation to each other

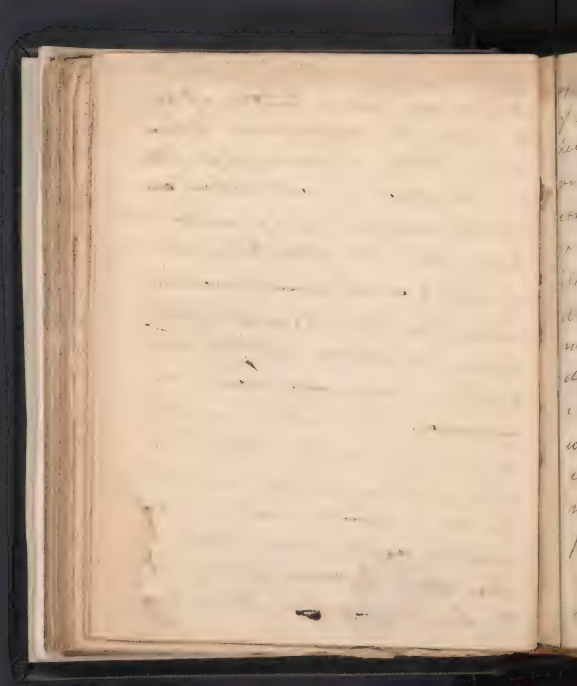
superficial action constitutes the means
that insure a happy termination of
the complaint. Bloodletting, when
indicated by excitement in the pulse
he believed would have been destruc-
tive to the patient, already scarcely
possessed of strength enough to sus-
tain the phenomena of life.

Bleeding says Dr. Sennarum if di-
rected or repeated by the inflame-
mentary appearance of the blood
will generally hasten the death of
the patient by diminishing strength
faster than it can abate dis-
ease — So fatal indeed was the
use of the Lancet in this fever
within the observation of Le-
net that he declared he never
saw a patient survive the op-



action. The symptom of pain ac-
companying fever is thought often
to justify the employment of blood-
letting. It is a primary symptom
and the effect of great action ex-
citing remedies are no doubt
proper; but it is often the effect
of such a weak degree of motor
action, that adds to a debilitated
state of the whole system, de-
pletion in any way would be
injurious; and it will frequently
continue by habit in spite of all
other remedies, yielding only to
the use of opium, a medicine pow-
erful in exciting new action.

Pain in the human referring to
the disease of which I have been

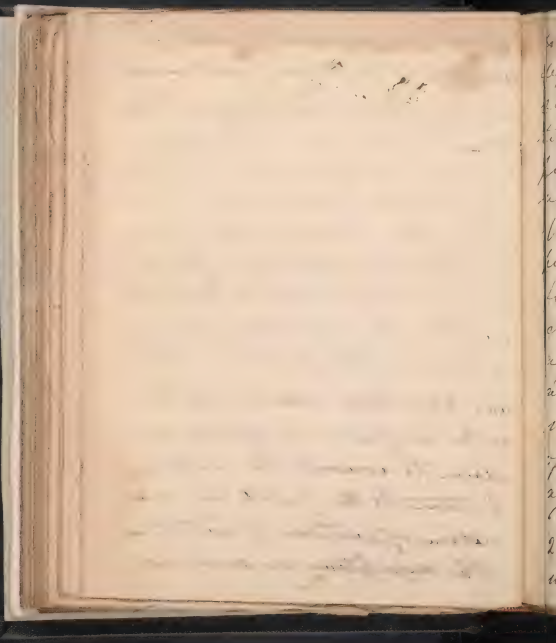


suffering should be relieved by the use
of opium without hesitation at any
period of the disease when it is
mortal; for tho' it be originally a
consequence of the disease, it becomes
at a time a powerful cause of
its continuance and increase.

Altho' improvements in the manage-
ment of typhoid in women have ren-
dered purgatives far more much less
common now than formerly, on
which account when it does oc-
cur its inflammatory nature
may require a free use of ^{the} de-
pleting plan; still it is suffi-
cient for my purpose to have
shown, that the Lancet when



in obedience to the demands of the pulse, has been not only prejudicial but frequently fatal — The fatal effects of the agent is a disease vulgarly called swooping, and which assumes some variety of operation can have escaped the notice of but few physicians. But often as it has occurred to their observation, the difficulty of managing it has frequently perplexed them, and sometimes almost led them in the confusion of anxiety and alarm to commit the suffering patient to the feeble and uncertain operations of nature — The symptoms are such as



to seem to require a free use of
depleting remedies and the con-
sequence ^{of their abolition} of the, that of pros-
trating the patient beyond the
power of the physician to res-
cue him — A history by Lan-
cungham of an epidemic which
prevailed in Leicester 1800, af-
fords some idea of the diffi-
culty of treating certain diseases
residing to the state of the pulse
and other symptoms of high
nervous action. For the sake
of brevity I shall ~~omit~~
a case which he has published
of an active robust man aged
26 indisposed by a slight catarrh
was attacked with a chill at a

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fox chase; during the chill he vomited
freely of cold water and vomited
so incessantly. Fever succeeded
and about an hour from its
commencement I saw him;
he has a frequent dry cough
oppression and pain of the
breast and head, pulse full
and rather tense, and in fact
the symptoms of pneumonia
complete. I opened a vein
and drew $xu \frac{2}{3}$ blood, gave an
effervescent mixture to check
the vomiting and, ^{afterwards} an antimonial
febrifuge to promote perspi-
ration. At 9 P.M. he was much
relieved and inclined to sleep.
On the 11 at 7 ~~P.M.~~ A.M. saw

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him again and by my assistant found him quite exhausted, his pulse feeble extremities cold and of a bluish hue; lips and tongue covered with a dark scurf and fissures, his eyes of a glassy appearance and pupils somewhat dilated, with typhomania. Blisters were applied and calomel, but he fell comatose at 4 P.M.

There are few perhaps who will not be disposed to attribute the indeed death of the patient in this case to the loss of blood which he sustained. The practice was such as prevailing theory and gene-

val analogy justifies, yet it was
unsuccessful under the direction
of an eminent physician, who
was so alarmed at the conse-
quences of bloodletting, that
he was at a loss when to pre-
scribe and when to omit it.

Dr Barton also speaks of an epi-
demic in which the state of the
pulse and symptom of pain were
such as to induce an adoption
of the antiphlogistic plan. Death
was the melancholy issue of every
case thus treated, and a resort
to the bark was as successful
as a different practice had
been before that - So true is
the remark of Oribase that symp.

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Forms of disease are often incompat-
ible with the remedies which
seem necessary for their remo-
val — The frequency of gan-
dix, Scroph and some other &c.
eases, succeeding intermitting and
remitting fevers, has been addu-
ced as proof that the Lancet is
often improperly withheld. As
disease does not always appear
in the same nosological class
an ⁱⁿattention to the changing
state of the system may some-
times have been productive
of these disagreeable effects.
But if it be feeble theory to say
that the other systems are often
too debilitated to bear the loss

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of support they would suffer from
a situation of the excitement
of the arteries; that the bark
suspends the action of the ir-
ritant that continues disease
or transmits the latter to a
part less capable of being fa-
tally acted on; if this reason-
ing be objected to, I have only
to appeal to the opinions and
experience of physicians; and
there are few I suppose who
would not attribute generally
these consequences of fever
to some neglect ^{as to} the quan-
tity or times of administering
the bark — The mischief re-
sults from too great a reliance

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on the pulse is taken notice of by
Lind in his treatise on Hot cli-
mates - The inexperienced disci-
ples of Sydenham and those who
have read authors that treat of
inflammatory diseases only, he
advises, ^{in hot climates} to abstain from the use
of the lancet entirely and to trust
to other remedies - For this ve-
ry imperfect essay I have several
apologies to offer; the want of
accuracy and minuteness in writ-
ters in their relation of symp-
toms, especially that of the pulse;
the incompetency of a student to
treat a medical subject; and above
all a requisition of the University

on the subject is to be made of
to be in the theatre on that
matter. The impression
has of observation and that
has been another that
information is not only
to be obtained from the
of the direct interest and to
to other persons. For this
my simplified system of
appears to appear; the
accuracy and interest in
two in their relation of
tongue especially that of the
the most history of a
that a revised subject in
as a representation of the

which is a sufficient excuse for
the failure of an attempt that ~~as~~
has received no aid from a feeling
of confidence in the writer, or if
it have any merit, owes it to the
learning and abilities of those ^{persons} who
have endeavoured to inculcate in
their pupils sound principles of medi-
cine.

the future of our country that we
for receive as we have a feeling
of confidence in the country
it have any doubt, even to the
highest and noblest of them, that
have no reason to doubt in
their faith in our country.